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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: social integration

Statement by the International Association of Schools of Social Work, the International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and UNANIMA International, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2001/1.

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Statement

1. The NGO Committee for Social Development, in collaboration with the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, conducted an online consultation on *good practices for social integration* in preparation for the forty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development.

2. Participants from 190 civil society organizations from 64 countries contributed their success stories in creating an enabling environment for an inclusive society. The good practices embrace a wide range of populations: people living in poverty, women, children, youth, older people, indigenous peoples, migrants, ethnic minorities and people living with disabilities. In spite of today's many crises, civil society organizations have demonstrated that a "society for all" is indeed possible.

3. The exercise uncovered some essential characteristics of effective practices of social integration, including: benefit the whole society; community-based; engage beneficiaries; sustainability; and replicability. The surveys clearly indicate that social integration/inclusion is not a vague concept. It is a principle that non-governmental organizations are implementing on a daily basis.

4. The survey also identified barriers to social integration and policy recommendations that might enhance social integration.

5. The most frequently mentioned barriers were lack of education (74 responses), gender inequality, gender stereotyping, patriarchal attitudes or abusive cultural practices (55 responses); and poverty (52 responses). Other barriers identified by respondents included: lack of access to health care, housing and other social services (36); unemployment and underemployment (48); lack of investment in social infrastructure and poverty eradication strategies (38); discrimination against migrants (43); disparity of wealth (27); macroeconomic policies (15); stigma (11) and discrimination (28); lack of participatory governance processes, corruption and political instability (21); absence of human and spiritual values and morality (30); difficulties facing youth including extremism (11).

Recommendations

6. Responsible societies respect and care for the most vulnerable individuals and understand the importance of including everyone in the social fabric.

Education

7. Universal access to quality education provides long-lasting social dividends that contribute to social inclusion. However, those benefits will only be realized if Governments:

(a) Provide childcare and early childhood education in areas and communities of social disadvantage;

(b) Ensure meaningful participation by children and young people in the society;

(c) Reform education, where necessary, to reduce all forms of discrimination, stigma and to address cultural beliefs that maintain social exclusion;

(d) Educate the staff of statutory agencies in dealing with social and economic disadvantage;

(e) Train staff working with people with disabilities in special education theory and practice;

(f) Collaborate with the media in educating the wider community in protecting the human rights and gifts of people who are different, be they indigenous, migrants or the physically or mentally challenged.

Social protection

8. Surveys highlighted the necessity for policies that link social protection, social and human development and job creation and income generation. Social programmes need to be developed and delivered in a decentralized and participatory manner, place people at the centre and:

- Guarantee adequate minimum income
- Provide access to medical care and mental health services
- Develop housing and shelter that is affordable and socially mixed
- Ensure accessibility of services, facilities and information, particularly for persons with disabilities and migrant populations
- Develop policies that provide social protection, health care and education for all migrants, refugees, indigenous and internally displaced persons
- Abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against persons, particularly women and those with disabilities
- Regularize and simplify procedures for registering births.

Decent work and employment

9. A significant number of respondents indicated that opportunities for decent work and income that enable a dignified life are key to promoting social inclusion. Participants recommended that Governments:

(a) Establish employment and job training programmes so that individuals are prepared to work in the twenty-first century workforce;

(b) Address poverty eradication by creating real employment rather than through short-term programmes that have no ongoing prospects;

(c) Support income generation through microcredit programmes and tax breaks for vulnerable populations;

(d) Provide financial support for business start-ups to people challenged by disabilities;

(e) Enact labour laws that protect workers and respect their dignity and rights; and provide international support to countries in the developing world to create employment and to prevent their citizens being forced to leave their native countries.

Macroeconomic policies

10. Respondents also called attention to the need for macroeconomic reform to support more sustained social integration and urge the international community to:

- Regulate tax systems for a more equitable distribution of public funds
- Reverse the unfortunate trend to cut programmes for those living in poverty from budgets in times of economic crisis
- Encourage local investment in developing countries to stop the flow of employable people from their own countries
- Develop legislation that prevents the exploitation of a country's natural resources at the expense of its citizens
- Promote integral land reform, especially for rural families, to guarantee them food sovereignty, health and decent housing and access to markets
- Penalize usury, exploitation of labour and human trafficking
- Establish ethical economic principles and laws that discourage speculation
- Encourage national Governments and private companies, especially the banks, to adopt socially responsible policies that focus on the common good.

Personal agency and local participation

11. Many surveys stressed the importance of individuals and communities being involved in the decisions that affect their lives and called on Governments to implement strategies that increase local participation. Respondents called for the international community to:

(a) Develop local and regional dialogues to discuss key issues and policies and ensure that representation is wide-ranging and inclusive,

(b) Recognize the importance of locally relevant and locally generated information and the participation of the relevant social actors from all sectors of society in decision-making;

(c) Ensure that government projects address the realities of the local communities and include systematic, participatory processes that can be evaluated.

Affirmative action

12. Social integration requires proactive policies. Respondents urged Governments to:

(a) Enact and enforce anti-discrimination laws and policies that promote the social and economic integration of marginalized groups, including women;

(b) Establish service delivery protocols for government agencies that give priority to social inclusion and the fostering of diversity;

(c) Set up training, adaptation and support structures and develop community awareness programmes in order to ensure that people with disabilities can participate in community life as equal citizens with real expectations, hopes and dreams;

(d) Demonstrate respect for cultural diversity and initiatives to reclaim cultures, languages and traditions and honour peoples' right to self-determination.

Immigration

13. Many surveys drew attention to the need for immigration reform as a significant means of promoting social integration. Migrants experience discrimination, abuse of their human rights and social exclusion. Governments in receiving countries should take action to:

(a) Develop policies that consider the religious and cultural practices of the migrants and monitor policy implementation so that basic human rights are respected and not abused;

(b) Disseminate information about laws, regulations and government services in various languages;

(c) Provide affordable and convenient language classes for all immigrants;

(d) Supervise working and living conditions, working hours and safety devices, including ensuring compensation for injuries, payment of just wages and protection of foreign workers;

(e) Protect foreign women and girls who are deceived into serving as exploited labour or participating in the sex trade;

(f) Foster intercultural relations in both sending and receiving countries.